

Biodefense and law center collaborating with other disciplines

By Andrew Bell/Staff Reporter

Americans saw the anniversary of an attack on the nation Oct. 15. Two years ago, a person in Sen. Tom Daschle's office opened a letter that released spores of anthrax. The spores went airborne and infected people in the office.

People at Texas Tech and in the city of Lubbock have been working hard to make sure the community and region can be prepared in the event of a biological attack. In September 2001, Chancellor Dr. David Smith appointed the Task Force for Anti-Terrorism and Public Security to determine how the university could best respond to the region and the nation through Tech's research, education and community service resources, according to information

from the Center for Biodefense, Law and Public Policy.

One of the recommendations the Task Force presented was the formation of the Center for Biodefense, Law and Public Policy to address law and public policy issues. Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Brian Shannon said the center was the first in the nation.

"We were the first to do this. An educational institution shouldn't be static. Universities can get into the pattern of going with what's happened before. This shows we're being responsive and on the cutting edge," Shannon said.

The center's policies are brought about by a collaboration of many different colleges on campus. The disciplines of law, public policy, mass communications, political science, microbiology,

medicine, forensic pathology, animal and food science and plant science comprise the range of fields represented by the faculty associated with the center.

Shannon said the collaboration is the main idea behind the center.

"The main idea is that it is a one-stop shopping opportunity. A major university can have a collaboration among the sections with research and pull the pieces together in case of a terrorism attack," he said.

One way the university has tried to pull the pieces together is by running simulated events to see how people respond, Provost William Marcysaid. The events are a way to show how policy issues play in established protocols.

"Tech ran a simulated event about two weeks ago. We went through the

steps to see if the policy worked and check any gaps in the protocol," Marcy said. "If the real thing happens, hopefully the gaps will be closed."

The event was a simulation of an explosion and fire at University Avenue and 19th Street. Marcy said it was an ideal location because the event would affect the campus and the traffic flow. He explained the use of the center and simulated events are an indirect benefit.

"The benefits are indirect. If the policies are in place and understood, the people respond and know where the boundaries are. Without it, it diminishes the effectiveness of the response," he said.

Victoria Sutton, director of the center and professor of law, said the Tech School of Law has set the standard for

other universities in the nation.

"We are one of two or three law schools which has a center focused on this subject. Many more centers and courses will be coming around the nation," Sutton said. "Texas Tech is on the cutting edge of the issue and a leader among law schools."

Shannon said the center is a resource to assist local governments respond to any bioterrorist attack.

"It is an information resource clearinghouse to assist the state and local government to respond to a threat," he said.

Marcy said the center helps bring forward discussion to make good policy decisions, which are important to make sure the process would run smoothly in the event of an attack.

"It helps to delineate policy issues,

which is important to state officials, legislatures and individuals," he said. "It helps to put the policies in some kind of forward discussion. The center can bring about good policy decisions."

Shannon said the center is unique because it gives students the opportunity to add their voices to the project.

"It is an open forum. It is an opportunity for graduate and undergraduate students to have the opportunity to shape policies," he said. "It is also a chance for law students and other students across the spectrum to add their voice."

Marcy said the Office of the Provost provided the funding to get the program up and running. In about three years, he said he believes the Center will be able to be self-supportive through grants.